

Senate Approves Sudan Divestment

STATE HOUSE – Last week The Senate voted 33-0 to require the State of Rhode Island to divest from companies in Sudan that support the Sudanese government's ongoing genocide in the country's Darfur region

Sponsored by Sen. Rhoda E. Perry (D-Dist. 3) of Providence, the legislation (2007-S 0087) would require the State Investment Commission, which controls the state pension fund, to identify companies that support the Sudan government's efforts to carry out the genocide and in which the state invests.

Under the bill, the state would identify its investments in those companies, notify the companies, and pull Rhode Island's investments in those companies in two stages: 50 percent of its total investment in complicit companies would be pulled after nine months, the rest after 15 months. Investments would not be pulled from any company that proves it is not complicit supporting the genocide.

"Just because we're a small government on the other side of the planet does not mean that there's nothing we can do to help the victims of this genocide," said Senator Perry. "We can pull out the money that we have invested in several companies that not only have close ties to Sudan's government, but also directly provide services that are used to carry out the genocide. In fact, if we don't, we bear some of the responsibility for this crime ourselves, because we are helping those who fund it."

The bill will now be forwarded to the House of Representatives, where Rep. Joseph S. Almeida (D-Dist. 12) of Providence is sponsoring identical legislation (2007-H 5142).

The bill applies to companies with military supply contracts as well as those with substantial assets in power production, oil and mining in Sudan. It targets those industries because Sudan taxes them at rates of 50 to 80 percent, so cutting off money that goes to them would have the effect of cutting off substantial funding to Sudan's government. Additionally, those companies are in a position to put pressure on the government if they feel squeezed.

General Treasurer Frank T. Caprio has strongly supported the legislation, and

has already identified two companies with ties to the genocide in which the state currently has investments: Petronus, a major player in the Sudanese oil industry with downstream fuel sales that include refueling Sudanese government aircraft which are used to bomb villages in Darfur; and Rolls Royce, which has a history of selling oil engineering equipment to Sudan. The state's investment in those companies amounts to approximately \$2 million.

The bill is carefully designed to prevent the state from losing any money in the move, by requiring the state to reinvest in companies with similar returns.

In the last four years, at least 400,000 people in the region of Darfur, in the western part of Africa's largest nation, have died as a result of the Arab government's effort to wipe out black tribal peoples. Entire villages are wiped out by bombing by Sudan's air force and by Islamic warriors known as the "janjaweed" ("evil on horseback") who kill and rape villagers, burn homes and crops, and destroy infrastructure, water supplies and livestock.

Sudan's government is also blocking humanitarian aid to Darfur. Millions of people in Darfur are now hungry. About 2.5 million people have been displaced by the violence.

The divestment legislation follows similar actions by Brown University and

the City of Providence, which last year became the first city in the United States to take action to divest in the African country because of the genocide.

For more information on the crisis in Sudan and the Sudan divestment movement, visit the Sudan Divestment Task Force Web site at www.sudandivestment.org.

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